The Extent to which the Body has to be Covered and the Importance of Hijaab

By

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Introduction

The eye has never witnessed a way of life that is so pure as that displayed by the beloved of Allaah Rasulullaah ρ. Without any intervention, this way of life was orchestrated and perfected by the Creator of the universe. Not only were people given the theoretical aspects of this lifestyle, but the Great Creator also gave attention to sending a most honoured guide in the form of the noble Prophet Muhammad ρ to give us a practical demonstration. Without the normal errors and omissions expected of normal people, Rasulullaah ρ exhibited an extremely moderate way of life which is an example for every human being for all times.

It is unfortunate that the high and pure character and behaviour that became a part of our Muslim history is not to be found in the later generations. The reasons for this moral decadence is certainly no secret to people of intelligence. Many analyses have been made and they are all unanimous about the fact that among others, one of the most significant reasons for the retrogression and progress of the Muslim Ummah has been the definition of the role of women in society.

We shall now present the opinion of a Western scholar. He writes:

"Throughout man's history there has never been a single example of a society that reached the apex of civilisation while its young boys and girls grew up in an environment that encouraged the mixing of men and women. You will not find a single example in history of a nation like this that could maintain its high level of civilisation. On the contrary, only those nations reached the apex of civilisation who restricted free mixing of its sexes.

Regardless of the geographical location of a nation, the level of their civilisation is determined only by the limitations and regulations that they set and implemented on the intermingling of sexes. To ascertain when a nation was at the height of civilisation and when the retrogressed, one needs to analyse the changes in the relationships between their men and women, which impacts on the rise and fall of their level of civilisation." {Sex of Culture by Professor Dr. J.D. Unwin - Cambridge University - Page 340}

Before mentioning the accurate measures of the Qur'aan and Ahadeeth, the cultures of various nations may be analysed in the light of the analysis made by this non-Muslim researcher. You will find yourself attesting to the truth of every word he says. There were times when people imposed restrictions on the intermingling of sexes and drew closer to becoming a successful society, whereas there were other times when they allowed wide liberalism between sexes thinking that it would guarantee them peace and contentment. An example of such an attitude can be seen from an extract if the following letter written to the author by Helmut Schmidt, a former Chancellor of Germany. He says:

"In the Federal Republic of West Germany, we discuss your mentioned points mostly in view of the existing youth law. Experience in other European countries has shown that wide liberalism in sex has cut down the rate of criminal faults and indecent assaults.

As a matter of principle, it is our system that we don't interfere in the moral view of our people, provided there is no fear of social defaults on the whole." {West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt in a letter to A.R. Arshad, dated 31/5/1977}

Warped Attitudes

You clearly see the difference between the views of Professor Dr J.D. Unwin and the German Chancellor Schmidt. Both these men fill positions of great importance in European society. However the difference in their attitudes are irreconcilable. Which attitude should be used as a standard? Just a few examples are sufficient to decide which to use. We shall present these examples from the European or perhaps the American society (both of which are very much the same).

The news media is witness to the fact that after sunset in New York, innumerable counts of rape, racial discrimination, murder and robbery are placed on record. This these despite the fact that New York lies beneath the very noses of the so-called champions of freedom and civil rights. Such is the landscape of a place that is supposed to be socially progressive.

For let us now take another example. European women generally dislike their religions and because they are well acquainted with the secrets of their household, their statements usually hold true when they comment on affairs related to them. Please read the following:

"People in Western societies are growing despondent in this age of escalating crime, collapse of family units, drugs and alcoholism. They therefore praise the system and regulations that Islaam has to offer."

"British women who have newly converted to Islaam have the following to say: 'What attracted us to Islaam was that it designates separate roles for men and women that are perfectly suited to their physical and psychological make-up.'" (The Times of London, 9 November 1993. Survey Report - "Why European women embrace Islaam")

A closer look at that analysis of the German Chancellor reveals that the freedom and resultant contentment (as they claim) that is given to society is intended to involve the youth in enjoying this freedom so that they pose no threat to the government. The same is also happening in many Muslim countries today. There are departments specially set up to involve the youth in pleasurable activities so that they pose no threat to the ruling parties.

The West German Chancellor makes an extremely superficial statement when he says: "...wide liberalism in sex has cut down the rate of criminal faults and indecent assaults...". Had the Chancellor been a man of insight, he would have noticed that this "white liberalism" has led to an increase in divorce, suicide, and a breakdown in family relationships. As a result, rather than peace and contentment it has given rise to heartbreak and dissension. This has ultimately led many women to search for peace in the Islaamic lifestyle.

Islaam and gender issues

Regulating the affairs of men and women has been the foundation by which Islaam has guided mankind for the past 1400 years. These same regulations are what make Islaamic societies so much better than their contemporary Western societies even today. Without these regulations in place, justice for all is not possible. The distinct roles of men and women in society may be described as complementary wheels on a vehicle or the two faces of a coin. Each has its own strength and identity which cannot be overlooked in any situation. As Dr. Unwin rightly pointed out, overlooking this aspect is the very thing that leads to social degeneration.

The extent to which the body needs to be covered (termed "satr") is a fundamental factor in differentiating between the status of men and women in society. There are restrictions imposed on the interaction between relatives which are not founded on the basis of man's intelligence, but have been determined by the Creator of mankind, Whose wisdom is complete. Allaah knows best all matters that are beneficial or detrimental to His creation. He knows best what is required for the success of any society.

The most important factor of any society is the women. The most valuable asset that a woman possesses is her chastity, her honour and her modesty. When these traits are protected, society is safeguarded. It is for this reason that Allaah has specified regulations with regard to them. Amongst these regulations are those pertaining to a woman's domestic life i.e. her life within her home. The second type of regulations pertain to a woman's social life i.e. her interaction with others outside her home. Both types of regulations are intended to safeguard her modesty.

Mixing up both these types of regulations (those pertaining to covering the "satr" and those pertaining to Hijaab) and giving importance to personal viewpoints has caused problems that are not secret to people with even a little bit of intelligence. Applying even a small bit of one's intelligence would make it clear that if the laws of Hijaab referred to the laws governing the covering of the "satr", the All Knowing and All Wise Allaah would not have revealed specific verses of the Qur'aan pertaining to Hijaab. Furthermore, these verses are addressed to the wives of Rasulullaah ρ (who are termed "the mothers of the Mu'mineen") and even the most morally degenerate person has the greatest respect for his mother.

It is of utmost importance that the regulations pertaining to "satr" and those pertaining to Hijaab should be practised separately.

The Extent to which the Body has to be Covered

"When a girl reaches the age of maturity, no part of her body should be seen besides her face and hands up to the wrist."

"When a girl reaches the age of maturity, it is not permissible for her to expose any part of her body besides her face and this." When Rasulullaah ρ said this, he held his hand on his arm in a manner that there remained only the space of a fist between his palm and the place where he held his arm. {Ibn Jareer}

The entire body of a woman is regarded as "satr" (needs to remain covered) besides the face and hands. The "satr" of a man is the area between the navel and the knees. It is Fardh (obligatory) for both men and women to observe the "satr" and ensure that these parts of their bodies stay covered at all times. They may be exposed only to one's spouse.

Allaah has defined the mode of dressing within one's home in the presence of one's family as well as the mode of dressing when stepping out of the home. One's dressing in front of one's household members and one's dressing in the presence of strangers have both been clearly defined. Allaah says:

Tell the Mu'mineen men that they should lower their gazes *(not look at non-Mahram women)* **and guard their chastity. This is purer for them** *(ensures their purity and the purity of society at large)*. **Allaah is Informed of what they do. And tell the Mu'mineen women that they should lower their gazes** *(not look at non-Mahram men with lust)* **and**

preserve their chastity. They *(women)* **must not expose** *(anything that reveals)* **their beauty** *(whether it is parts of the body, jewellery or clothing)***, except what becomes apparent of it** *(the outer garment, which obviously cannot be concealed when a woman leaves her home)***. And they should wear their scarves over their bosoms** *(to cover their heads as well as their breasts, unlike the scarves worn during the Period of Ignorance, which covered only the top of the head)***. They may expose their beauty** *(the face, head, arms and feet)* **only to their husbands, their fathers, their fathers-in-law, their sons, the sons of their husbands, their brothers, the sons of their brothers, the sons of their sisters, their women** *(other Muslim women)***, their** *(female)* **slaves, those male parasites who have no passions** *(those men who are not mentally alert, who have no interest in women and who visit certain houses only to get a plate of food to eat. Women have nothing to fear from them and are not attracted to them)***, or children who are not aware of women's private parts** *(those immature boys who are unaware of the anatomy and distinct features of women)***. They** *(women)* **should also not strike their feet on the ground to reveal the beauties** *(jewellery)* **that they conceal** *(they should therefore walk in a manner that does not cause their jewellery to jingle and attract attention)***. Collectively repent to Allaah, O you Mu'mineen, so that you may succeed** *(prosper in both worlds)***.** {Surah Noor, verses 30, 31}

There is no sin on those women who are sitting *(at home because of old age)* **and have lost all hope of marriage if they remove their** *(excess)* **clothing on condition that they do not expose their charms** *(thereby attracting men)***.** *(However,)* **It is best if they abstain from this** *(and still cover themselves as young women do)***. Allaah is All Hearing, All Knowing.** {Surah Noor, verse 60}

The Regulations of Hijaab

Even when a woman is within the confines of her own home, she is required to conceal herself completely from men who are not Mahram. This dissolves the notion of people who claim that women are allowed to expose their faces to strangers. To support their claim, they say that at the time of Hajj a woman

in Ihraam is not allowed to cover her face when there are hundreds of thousands of men about. If the matter was such, Allaah would not have revealed the following verses of the Qur'aan in which He states:

When you ask them *(non-Mahram women)* **for anything, then ask them from behind a curtain** *(without seeing them)***. This is purer for your hearts and for their hearts** *(for it safeguards you from evil thoughts and desires)***.** {Surah Ahzaab, verse 53}

O Nabi ρ! Tell your wives, your daughters and the women of the Mu'mineen that *(when they have to leave their homes for some necessity)* **they should draw down their "jalaabeeb" over themselves** *(they should wear a loose garment that covers the entire body without revealing the shape of the body and which has only a little opening to allow the woman to see)***. This is best for their recognition** *(to make it known that they are respectable women)* **so that they are not harmed.** {Surah Ahzaab, verse 59}

Now let us examine the ruling with regard to not covering the face when in the state of Ihraam.

Hadhrat Faatima bint Mundhir رضي الله عنها says, "We used to hang a veil in front of our faces during the state of Ihraam (without the cloth touching our faces). Hadhrat Asmaa رضي الله عنها the daughter of Hadhrat Abu Bakr τ was with us and she did not stop us from doing this." {Mu'atta of Imaam Maalik, Chapter on Hajj}

Hadhrat Aa'isha رضي الله عنها said, "In the state of Ihraam a woman may hang her shawl over her face." {Fat'hul Baari, Chapter on Hajj}

Hadhrat Aa'isha رضي الله عنها says, "When we women were with Rasulullaah ρ in Hajj, riders would pass by us. When someone passed in front of us, we would throw our veils over our faces and then lift them once they had passed." {Abu Dawood, The

Chapter concerning women covering their faces when performing Hajj}

There cannot be clearer guidelines to indicate that a woman's face should remain covered in front of strange men. It is difficult to even acknowledge the intelligence of those "enlightened" people who use the ruling of not covering the face in Ihraam to prove what they fancy. The endeavours of people who attempt such analogical deductions are nothing short of defiance to the teachings of the Qur'aan and Ahadeeth.

Hijaab and Newly Converted Women

Compare the attitudes of newly concerted Muslims to those of born Muslims with regard to the issue of Hijaab.

Likata is a Japanese woman who grew up in the Japanese society where miniskirts are common apparel and which knows no restrictions when intermingling of sexes is concerned. In pursuit of higher education, Likata left home and found herself in the colourful city of Paris amidst a European culture no less licentious than her own. While living in France, her inherent pure nature woke up from its slumber and by the will of Allaah, from just being Likata, she became Khowla Likata when she entered wholly into the Deen of Allaah. Since she had been bred and brought up without Hijaab, donning the Hijaab was naturally an extremely difficult task for her. However, because she was a conscious Muslim rather than just one who had inherited the Deen, no command of the Shari'ah was a "burden" for her. With great fervour, she started wearing the Hijaab.

Here is what she has to say, "Although I had not been used to wearing the Hijaab, I felt the benefits of it as soon as I

changed my religion. A Muslims woman wearing the Hijaab can be distinguished in any crowd. On the other hand, the beliefs of a non-Muslim can be communicated only by words. After entering into Hijaab, I do no have to speak a word because it makes my beliefs very clear. My Hijaab reminds others of Allaah and also reminds me that I have surrendered myself over to Allaah. My Hijaab constantly reminds me to be wise enough to conform my entire life to the Shari'ah. Just as the uniform of a policeman reminds him of his occupation, my Hijaab strengthens my identity as a Muslim."

"According to my understanding, Islaam encourages women to conceal their private areas as well as the rest of their bodies. Women may therefore adopt any type of *'burqa'* she likes as long as it is not very thin, tight or decorative. An elderly man once asked me about the Hijaab as I was travelling by train. I told him that I am a Muslim … (and after explaining the mode of dressing, I said to him) …While a miniskirt tells men that they may have me whenever they please, the Hijaab makes it clear to them that I am forbidden for them. The value of things escalate when they are hidden and therefore the attractiveness of a woman in Hijaab is increased, as can be seen in many cultures."

"Initially, I wondered how women wearing the veil could breathe … but when I first wore it, I loved it. I was absolutely astonished to feel that I am someone very important. I felt like a queen enjoying her sheltered pleasures. I now had a treasure with me which no one knew of and which no stranger had permission to see. Someone looking at the Hijaab from outside can never imagine the experience of being in it."

"I now have no fear of crowds because I feel invisible to men. Before I started covering my eyes, I used to feel disturbed whenever my eyes made contact with those of a man. Like a dark shades, my Hijaab protects me from the stares of

strangers. A person looking through the spectacles of prejudice does not deserve to see the prominence of a woman who is feeling content, respectable and confident because of her Hijaab. She is one upon whose face even the shadow of oppression has not passed."

These were excerpts from an interview with sister Khowla Likata which appeared in the March 1997 issue of *"Tarjumanul Qur'aan"*. This fervour and consciousness to practise complete Islaam is born only when a person enters into Islaam consciously. Many women do not have this great consciousness and take the injunctions of Islaam for granted because they have been born in Muslim homes and seem to have become Muslim "by chance".

Like Khowla Likata, when Maryam Jameela entered the circle of chastity, she also felt the contentment, respectability and confidence wearing the Hijaab despite spending so many years in the amoral American society. They understand that the laws of Hijaab are from the Creator of mankind and are filled with wisdom. It is unfortunate that Muslims with shallow understanding cannot perceive this and are so bewitched by things around them that they make all types of interpretations to suit their purposes. They sometimes look for a Fatwa from Egypt and also make "analytical deductions" from Ahadeeth.

Equipped only with the good intention of drawing people closer to Islaam, some Muslims search for certain Ahadeeth to tone down the emphasis on Hijaab. However, the fact of the matter is that if Hijaab were a burdensome difficulty, the Most Merciful and Most Compassionate Creator of the universe would never have asked His servants to wear it. More than we wish people to become Muslims, Allaah desires the same and had even sent hundreds of thousands of Ambiyaa to guide mankind.

The following is an excellent explanation by Sayyid Abul A'la Moududi of two apparently contradicting Ahadeeth concerning the blind Sahabi Hadhrat Abdullaah bin Ummi Maktoom τ. He writes, "The exceptions cited make it clear that completely forbidding looking is not the intention of the Shari'ah. The intention is to close the door to vice. Therefore, looking is forbidden only when there is no necessity and no benefit and when the possibility exists that passions may be aroused. Just as this prohibition applies to men, it applies equally to women as seen in the Hadith of Hadhrat Ummu Salma رضي الله عنها . She was once sitting with Rasulullaah ρ together with Hadhrat Maymoona رضي الله عنها (Hadhrat Aa'isha رضي الله عنها according to another narration) when the blind Sahabi Hadhrat Abdullaah bin Ummi Maktoom رضي الله عنها happened to pass by. Rasulullaah ρ instructed his two wives to conceal themselves. Hadhrat Ummu Salma رضي الله عنها asked, 'But he is blind and can neither see us or recognise us.' To this, Rasulullaah ρ replied, 'Are you two also blind? Can you not see him?'"

"There is however, a delicate difference between the passions of men and women. Men are bold in nature and generally make an effort to get what they want. On the other hand, women are generally hesitant and will not take the initiative to go forward and get what she wants unless her nature has been corrupted. Allaah has taken this natural disposition into account and has not placed the same emphasis on women not seeing men as He has placed on men not seeing women. The Hadith is therefore famous in which Rasulullaah ρ permitted Hadhrat Aa'isha رضي الله عنها to watch some Abyssinians performing in the Masjid on the day of Eid. (She was 15 or 16 years old at the time and was concealed with a shawl as she stood behind Rasulullaah ρ, looking over his shoulders). This makes it clear that there is no blanket prohibition for women to look at men. Of course, it is incorrect for a woman to meet with a man and make eye-to-eye contact with him. It is not permissible for her

to make any such contact with strange men that may lead to vice."

"It was in the home of the same Hadhrat Abdullaah bin Ummi Maktoom τ that Rasulullaah ρ told Hadhrat Faatima bint Qais رضي الله عنها to spend her Iddah. In his book *Ahkaamul Qur'aan*, Qaadhi Abu Bakr Ibnul Arabi writes that Hadhrat Faatima bint Qais رضي الله عنها wanted to spend her Iddah in the home of Ummu Shareek رضي الله عنها but Rasulullaah ρ told her not to do so because many people frequented her house. He advised her to rather spend her Iddah in the house of Hadhrat Abdullaah bin Ummi Maktoom τ because he was blind and she could move about the house without her veil. This makes it clear that the purpose of the prohibition is to exclude vice. The prohibition exists where there is possibility for vice. On the contrary, where the possibility for vice is low, the prohibition is relaxed because the lady needed a place to stay. When no necessity exists, a woman may not associate with a strange man."

"All of the above is based on various levels of wisdom which a person will easily understand when s/he understands the psychology of the Shari'ah. The person will then understand the benefits of the laws of lowering the gaze (one of the purposes of Hijaab). By understanding these benefits, one will understand the factors that make the prohibition either demanding or relaxed. By this prohibition, the Shari'ah intends to curb the casting of evil glances and has no enmity for your eyes." {*"Pardah"*, Pgs 300-302}

This excerpt is self-explanatory and needs no commentary. We shall therefore conclude by quoting a poem by Allaama Iqbal. He says:

"When the desire for looking breaks its border
Scattered and confused thoughts become the order"

It is apparent that people with scattered and confused thoughts cannot reach great heights of progress. The Almighty Creator has blessed mankind with the laws of 'satr' and Hijaab to ensure that man reaches these great heights of progress.

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